Embodied cognition in the barrier personality

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Abstract

Psychodynamic-informed content analyses of body boundaries provide an empirical method to provide an in-depth interpretation of cognitive influences that motivate linguistic constructions of political texts, autobiographies and memories and other forms of literary text. Consistent with cognitive linguistics, psychological, psychodynamic views that perceive semiotic processes and a coherent bodily self to be acquired in early socialization experiences (Fisher & Cleveland, 1958; Winnicott, 1971; Violi, 2012), this study provide further insights how individuals that vary in their body boundary finiteness differ in narrating everyday events. A corpus-based analysis using the USAS tool (Rayson et al., 2004) identified salient semantic domains in written narratives of autobiographical narratives of High and Low Barrier personalities. As predicted, High Barrier personalities used more semantic domains representing CONTAINER-schematic imagery (Johnson, 1987) and primordial mental activity (e.g., bodily, sensory, motion and spatial references) that represent structural elements of embodied image schemata (Bergen & Chang, 2007) (i.e., TRAJECTORY-LANDMARK, SOURCE-PATH-GOAL) as well as PART-WHOLE schemas, compared to the semantic domains related to conceptual thought (e.g., knowledge and emotion references) in Low Barrier personalities. Whereas Low Barrier personalities communicate their thoughts and emotions directly, High Barrier personalities expressed their emotions figuratively by mapping emotions onto bodily parts and processes. Such an indirect expression of emotions relates to an increased inhibitory control to minimize the threat of negative social evaluations (cf. O'Keefe &

Nadel, 1978). In summary, the results indicate that the inflation of motion image schemata and embodiment of emotions in High Barrier personalities symbolize the Freudian (creative) mode of primordial functioning in relation to the external bodily functions, whereas Low Barrier personalities align with conceptual cognitive functioning. The discussion relates these findings to the interpretation of historical and political texts, as well as its implication within the wider empirical realm of cognitive linguistics as a science of developmental socialization process, such as proposed by psychodynamic theories.

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